

Planning Department

FYI

**TOWN OF ACTON**  
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**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Don P. Johnson, Town Manager  
Dean Charter, Tree Warden  
**Date:** October 12, 2005

**From:** Roland Bartl, AICP, Town Planner *R.B.*

**Subject:** Intersection Improvements at Pope and Brabrook Roads

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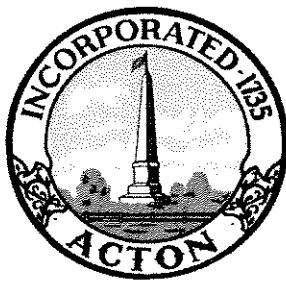
Attached please find a letter from the Planning Board to the Board of Selectmen with recommendations for intersection improvements at Pope and Brabrook Roads.

One of the Planning Board's recommendations is for the removal of two remaining oak trees in the Pope Road right of way to improve sight distance at Brabrook Road. Please consider this letter a request of the Planning Board to initiate the legal steps and procedures required to reconsider the trees' removal.

Further, please advise the Planning Board if and when the matter will be scheduled before the Board of Selectmen.

Thank You

Cc: Planning Board ←  
Engineering Department



Planning Board

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**INTERDEPARTMENTAL COMMUNICATION**

**To:** Board of Selectmen **Date:** October 11, 2005  
**From:** Planning Board  
**Subject:** Intersection Improvements at Pope and Brabrook Road

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In connection with the Ellsworth Village project in East Acton, the Planning Board has on numerous occasions heard testimony and received professional evaluations regarding the apparent lack of sight distance at the Pope and Brabrook Roads intersection:

- a. At first, the traffic consultant of the Ellsworth Village developer recommended "desirable" changes to improve sight distance between Pope Road southbound traffic and cars exiting Brabrook Road. The recommendation suggested the removal of three public shade trees and the lowering of the shoulder grade on the westerly side of Pope Road looking north on Pope Road. The Acton Engineering Department also noted the lack of adequate sight distance.
- b. Residents in the area agree that sight distance for drivers exiting Brabrook Road "feels" unsafe. They also report numerous "close calls" although the Police Department has no record of intersection related accidents in that area. Several residents also expressed concerns with crossing the street to reach the sidewalk on the other side of Pope Road and with respect to children waiting at the intersection due to purportedly high vehicle speeds on Pope Road. Apparently this is a school bus stop.
- c. The Planning Board in its Ellsworth Village special permit required the improvements as recommended by the developer's consultant subject to further approval after a public shade tree hearing.
- d. At the shade tree hearing Dean Charter, Acton's Tree Warden, stated his objection to the proposed removal of two significant trees. The trees in question are stately oak trees although they are not the most significant examples. The Tree Warden did agree to the removal of several other less "valuable" trees.
- e. In an effort to find a solution, the Planning Board agreed on an interim measure to remove the trees that the Tree Warden agreed to cut down and to re-grade the shoulder somewhat taking care not to injure the two trees that the Tree Warden sought to protect. This work has been done.
- f. Subsequent inspections by the Engineering Department and the developer's traffic consultant yield mixed reviews.
- g. Engineering believes that sight distance is still insufficient. It is the Planning Board's understanding that the Engineering Department has proposed a "thickly settled" advisory sign for a location north of the intersection, which carries a "prima facie" speed limit of 30mph. The posted speed limit at the intersection is 35 mph. The 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed has been measured at 41 mph. The Engineering Department also seems to be prepared to

look into posting a 30 mph speed zone north of the intersection and to find out what level of study and documentation MassHighway requires for such a change.

- h. The developer's traffic consultant and site engineer believe that the intersection would be reasonably safe with an advanced intersection warning sign, but concede that the improvements so far fall short of the desirable level of improvement.
- i. Both Engineering and the traffic consultant seem to agree that changes in speed limit postings will help some for enforcement purposes, but will not fundamentally change drivers' behavior, i.e. the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed in this area.
- j. While there seems to be sufficient stopping sight distance in Pope Road for southbound travel at the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed (drivers seeing objects in the road), the sight distance for drivers exiting Brabrook Road (looking from a location 5-10 feet off the side edge of Pope) is significantly less. As a result drivers can exit Brabrook Road at a moment when drivers on Pope Road have already approached close enough to be below the threshold for safe stopping.

Based on the testimony received and outlined above, the Planning Board has reached the conclusion that it would be most prudent to pursue

1. The removal of the other two oak trees and further lowering of the shoulder grade as originally proposed to align the viewing sight distance from Brabrook Road with the safe stopping sight distance for southbound traffic on Pope Road. The Planning Board understands that, following the Tree Warden's ruling, this would now have to come before the Board of Selectmen for a definitive ruling.
2. Post a "thickly settled" sign as an immediate measure to enable enforcement of a 30 mph speed at the intersection.
3. If appropriate and deemed effective by the Engineering Department, also post an intersection warning sign.
4. A 30 mph speed zone for Pope Road southbound traffic approaching the Brabrook Road intersection from the north following necessary MassHighway approvals.

Cc: Tree Warden  
Engineering Department  
James B. Fenton (Ellsworth Village)

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## Roland Bartl

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**From:** Dean Charter  
**Sent:** Wednesday, October 12, 2005 11:44 AM  
**To:** Roland Bartl  
**Cc:** Bruce Starnski  
**Subject:** Pope / Brabrook trees

Roland,

I spoke to Don after Staff Meeting, and checked the statute. Don feels that it would be best to hold a full blown hearing on the removal of the trees, so that all sides get a chance to be heard. Since the Planning Board came up with the idea to require Fenton to remove the trees, the PB should make a written request to me to post the two remainders, and to hold the hearing. The PB thus would be the applicant, and should plan on making a presentation at the BOS meeting. My read on it is that Fenton still pays to remove the trees, if that is what the BOS decide. When you get the letter from the applicant (PB) I will get started on the advertisement.